

*Note on Ghargáon, Asím.*—By J. M. FOSTER, F. R. G. S., *Nazeerah, Assam.*

Ghargáon, for many years the capital of the Ahom kings of Asím, is so little known, or cared for even by those acquainted with its existence, that it has been thought worth while to place a record of its appearance at the present date in the hands of those likely to appreciate such, as in all probability a few years more will see the place a heap of undistinguishable ruins, or worse still, converted into materials for building purposes. Time, neglect, the heavy rains of the country, and frequent earthquakes, have much injured this once noble pile of masonry; but strange to say, the hand of man has done but little damage so far, a few attempts to find hidden treasure by digging being the only mischief visible: the scarcity of inhabitants, the respect and awe with which it is regarded, may have served to protect it so far; but it is much to be regretted that so interesting a specimen of architecture should have been allowed to fall into such a state, that the abovementioned causes, and that curse of ancient Indian masonry, the Pípal tree, must inevitably complete its utter ruin before many years pass over.

The following extracts from "A Descriptive Account of Asam, by William Robinson, 1841" give a slight sketch of the founder and the history of the place.

P. 318. "Of the state of the district antecedent to the conquest of the Ahoms we know nothing. It was in all probability filled by an abundant Hindu population, from whom the bulk of the present inhabitants have descended. The Ahoms were for many generations confined to the tract east of the Dehing. As their power increased, their conquests extended beyond that river, on the left bank of which they founded their first capital Huluguri-nugur. About half-way between Jaipur and Dehing Mukh, extensive remains of the fortifications of the Nugur are still to be seen."

"On the further advance of their arms, the Ahoms removed the seat of government to Ghergaon on the banks of the Dikko, which continued to be the principal residence of the princes till the prosperity of the Ahom dynasty began to fade. The royal palace at Ghergaon was surrounded by a brick wall about two miles in circumference, but the whole town and its suburbs appear to have extended over many square miles of country. The ruins of gateways built chiefly of masonry are still to be seen within the fortified circumvallations which surround the town. It may be observed that one of the gateways is composed of stone, the blocks bearing marks of iron clampings, which evidently shows that they once belonged to far more ancient

edifices. From this evidence alone, were there no other, it might safely be presumed that, long antecedent to the conquests of the Ahoms, the country had been possessed by a race of inhabitants far advanced in some of the arts civilized life."

Ghargáon was for certain reasons subsequently abandoned, and Rangpúr, situated lower down the river and on its left bank, was fixed upon as the capital. In the troubled reign of Gorínát'h (1780 to 95), Rangpúr was abandoned for Jorhát, but even here, the Rájah was not safe, and he fled for refuge to Gauháfi. On Gorínát'h's restoration, Jorhát again became the seat of government, and continued so until the conquest of the country by the British troops (1826).

P. 163. "On the death of Sarga Naraiyan, A. D. 1539, Chuckenmung succeeded to the throne, (he is said to have instigated the assassination of the preceding Raja Chuhunmung or Dihinaja Raja, or Sarga Naraiyan). He is said to have built the town and fort of Gargaun, or Ghergong. He reigned thirteen years and was succeeded by his son Chuekampha. Nothing remarkable is recorded of him except that he enjoyed the throne for fifty-nine years in comparative peace and comfort."

P. 165. "In 1654, Chutumla succeeded his father Churumpha who was deposed and put in prison for imbecility. Soon after his accession, he adopted the Hindu faith and assumed the name Jaiyadhajia Singh. At the latter end of his reign, in 1661, the valley was invaded by Mir Jumla, the Subadar of Bengal, who sent up his stores and provisions in boats, but crossing the Bhrmaputra at Rangamati, marched his army by land. The march was tedious and on its progress the army was greatly annoyed by the Assamese. This added to the fatigue of dragging the boats, greatly affected the troops. The Subadar at length reached the capital Ghergaon, which, after a severe conflict, he succeeded in taking, and the Raja was obliged to take refuge in the mountains. The rains of 1662 set in with great violence, and the Raja issued from his place of concealment in the mountains and cut off the provisions of the Moguls. A pestilence also broke out in the camp which carried off many, whether they returned or remained they were equally exposed to death: in this miserable state they passed the rains, but no sooner was the country dry, than, according to the Musalman historians, they took courage and bravely repelled the enemy. The Raja is said to have solicited peace, which Mir Jumla was happy to grant, for he was himself attacked by disease and his troops were mutinous. The same accounts state that the Assamese were obliged to give 20,000 tolahs of gold, 100,000 of silver, and 40 elephants; and the Raja gave up his daughter to be married to one of the Muhammadan princes, and agreed to pay an annual tribute. The native annals on the contrary inform us that Mir Jumla's army was entirely defeated, and he was obliged to give up the whole of the

zillah Kamrup to the Assamese, which was from that time placed under the management of a great Assamese officer, the Barphukan, and formed a government equal to about a third of the whole kingdom. Jaiyadhajia Singh died in 1663.

“He was succeeded by Chupuungmung who was assassinated in 1672. The latter was succeeded by his younger brother Sucklumpha who was secretly poisoned two years after at the instigation of the Bar Baruwa, who assumed a great degree of authority, although he had installed Sulung, the young prince of Samaguriya. The Queen objecting to the Bar Baruwa’s usurpation, laid a plot for destroying him which he discovered, and despatched the king with his own hands, whilst his myrmidons assassinated the Queen and members of the Council. The young king reigned but one month and fifteen days. The Bar Baruwa next raised Teenkungiya to the throne; but the officers of Gowhatty with a body of troops proceeded to the metropolis, secured the Bar Baruwa, beheaded him and strangled the new Raja after a reign of twenty days. Chujinpha was then placed on the throne, who committed suicide in 1677. In 1699, Chuekungpha founded the city and fort of Rungpur (Sibsagor), and caused the extensive tank to be made which still bears his name. In 1770, the Moamariah captured Ghergaon, but it was recaptured five months later by the adherents of Luckmi Singh, who died in 1780. The Moamariah, in 1781, after some tremendous battles again captured the place, and the king, Chuhitpungpha escaped to Gowhatti: after many changes of various kinds, the British Government sent a detachment to aid them in 1792, under Captain Welsh, who successfully put down the Moamariah insurrection.” The Burmese invasion, a matter of modern history, was finally suppressed by the British troops at Rungpur in 1825; since that date, the authority of the Assam Rajas has been at an end.”

Another version, by a contemporary, of the invasion of Assam is to be found in an old work entitled, ‘Particular Events, or the most Considerable Passages after the War of Five Years or thereabout, in the Empire of the Great Mogul,’ Tom. II. By Mons. F. Bernier, London, 1671.’

P. 110. “Aurengzebe too well knowing that a great Captain cannot be long at rest, and that, if he be not employed in a Foreign War, he will at length raise a Domestick one; proposed to him to make War upon that rich and potent Raja of Achem, whose Territories are on the North of Dake, upon the Gulf of Bengala. The Emir, who in all appearance had already designed the same thing of himself, and who believed, that the Conquest of this Country would make way for his Immortal Honour, and be an occasion of carrying his Arms as far as China, declared himself ready for this Enterprize. He embarked at Dake with a puissant Army, upon a River which comes from those parts; upon which having gone about a hundred leagues North Eastward, he arrived at a Castle called Azo [Hájo], which the Rajah of

Acham had usurped from the Kingdom of Bengala, and possessed for many years. He attacked this place, and took it by force in less than fifteen daies; thence marching overland towards Chamdara, which is the Inlet into the Country of that Raja, he entered into it after 26 daies' journey, still Northward: There a Battel was fought, in which the Raja of Acham was worsted, and obliged to retreat to Guerguon, the Metropolis of his Kingdom, four miles distant from Chamdara. The Emir pursued him so close, that he gave him no time to fortifie himself in Guerguon; For he arrived in sight of that Town in five daies, which constrained the Raja, seeing the Emir's Army, to fly towards the Mountains of the Kingdom of Lassa, and to abandon Guerguon, which was pillaged as had been Chamdara. They found there vast riches, it being a great, very fair and Merchant-like Town, and where the women are extraordinarily beautiful. Meantime, the season of the Rains came in sooner than usually: and they being excessive in those parts, and overflowing all the Country, except such Villages as stand on raised ground, the Emir was much embarrassed. For the Raja made his people of the Mountains come down from all parts thereof, and to carry away all the provisions of the Field, whereby the Emir's Army (as rich as t'was) before the end of the rains, fell into great strights, without being able to go forward or backward. It could not advance by reason of the Mountains very difficult to pass, and continually pester'd with great Rains: nor retreat, because of the late Rains and deep ways; the Raja having also caused the way to be digged up as far as Chamdara: So that the Emir was forced to remain in that wretched condition during the whole time of the Rain; after which when he found his Army distasted, tired out, and half starved, he was necessitated to give over the design he had of advancing, and to return the same way he was come. But this retreat was made with so much pains, and so great inconveniences, by reason of the dirt, the want of victuals, and the pursuit of the Raja falling on the Rear, that every body (but he) that had not known how to remedy the disorder of such a March, nor had the patience to be sometimes five or six hours at one passage to make the Souldiery get over it without confusion, would have utterly perished, himself, army, and all; yet he notwithstanding all these difficulties, made a shift to come back with great honour and vast riches. He designed to return thither again the next year, and to pursue his undertaking, supposing that Azo which he had fortified, and where he left a strong garrison, would be able to hold out the rest of the year against the Raja. But he no sooner arrived there, but dysentery began to rage in his army. Neither had he himself a body of steel more than the rest; he fell sick and died, whereby fortune ended the just apprehensions of Aurengzebe. I say the just apprehensions, for there was none of those that knew this great man, and the state of affairs of Industan, who did not say: "Tis this day that Aurengzebe is king of Bengala."

In a work styled 'Tales of Shipwrecks and Adventures at Sea, London, 2nd Edit., 1852,' at page 705, under the heading, "Loss of the 'Ter Schelling,' including the various calamities of the crew, during an unfortunate voyage to Bengal in 1661," we find the following record of the progress of the Emir's army in Assam as related by some Dutch sailors who went to Ghargáon. The 'Ter Schelling' left Batavia for Bengal on the 3rd September, 1661, in company with two other vessels. On the 18th October, they sighted the coast of Bengal, parted company, got caught in a heavy storm, and struck several times on the sandbanks in the Sunderbans. They were finally wrecked, and the crew suffered great privations on the desert islands. Ultimately, eight of the crew (Charles Dobbel and seven others) left the islands in a boat, and travelled for many days, until picked up by some of the natives who took them to a village after plundering them of all money, &c. The 'Governor' treated them kindly and forwarded them to Bolwa [Bhaluah]. The narrative will be best continued in the original text. 'The night following they arrived at Assam [?], a poor despicable place that afforded nothing. Here they sent back the three barques and hired another as far as Bolwa. At two leagues' distance from this village, their guides set them on shore, and made them walk the rest of the way. Whilst these guides went to the governor to give notice of their arrival, our adventurers bought milk and rice, which they dressed in a pot that was sent them by Moors, that spoke the Portuguese language. It was nearly ready when their guides returned, and told them they must come immediately to the prince, who sent for them. This news displeased them, for their appetites were very keen; however they took the pot, and carried it by turns to the prince's palace gate; where they eat what was in it before they entered. They were at length brought to their lodging, and, by the prince's order, served with an excellent kind of meat called *brensie* [harísah,?], which is only seen here at great men's tables. This was such a nourishing food, that in three or four days they recovered their full strength. In a day or two after, the prince sent them word that they might go where they pleased, the barques being ready. This being their desire they parted an hour after, and happily arrived at Deeka. The factory received them very kindly, to whom our adventurers imparted their whole story.

"The governor now caused a barque to be ready to transport them to Ongueli [Húglí], where the Dutch have also a considerable factory. But an hour before the appointed time of their departure, the governor received a letter from the Great Mogul's general, in which he enjoined him to send them to him. This order they were obliged to obey, though contrary to their inclinations; for this general threatened, in case of refusal, to seize upon all the Dutch in his master's kingdom, and make them slaves. They travelled thirty days together, sometimes by land, and sometimes by sea, passing by se-

veral cities made desolate; the inhabitants of the country being wont, in time of war, to leave their houses, in order to follow the army wherever it marched.

“On the thirty-fifth day they went on board one of the vessels belonging to Nabah [the Nawáb], where they found four Englishmen, some few Portuguese, and two of their own party. From thence they went and cast anchor near the city of Renguemati. In a short time they landed and were entertained in the army of the Great Mogul. The general, whom they saluted in his tent, seemed glad to see them, and immediately ordered a large cup of arrack, that they might drink his health. The cup was so closed that it was a difficult matter for them to open it; and therefore the general ordered it on purpose, to divert himself with their embarrassments. Every one endeavoured to open it, but to no purpose; at last one of the party finding it was made of wood, made a hole in it with the point of his knife, and being brim-full the arrack sprung out abundantly. By this means they all drank of it; and it being a very strong liquor, they were soon intoxicated.

“The next morning the General sent them three hundred rupees, and assigned them certain vessels called gouropes [غراب *ghráb*], one of which carried fourteen guns, and about fifty or sixty men. Each gourope was attended with four kosses [كوسه *kosah*], which are boats with ears, to row great vessels. There were also several great flat-bottomed boats which carried no masts, but were well furnished with guns. The greatest part of the officers were Portuguese. There were several other vessels laden only with provisions and ammunition. As soon as they were ordered to march, our adventurers sought the vessel which was assigned to them; but, in the great multitude of people, two of them unfortunately went astray, and were eight days without knowing where to betake themselves. After a long march, these two wanderers entered Kosbia [Koch Bihár], a country lying between Bengal and Azo [Hájó].

“The Great Mogul’s general was at war with the king of Azo, and at this time subdued him. Our two adventurers expected a share of the plunder, but were disappointed. This was exceedingly mortifying to them; their wages, which were no more than ten crowns a month, being insufficient to maintain them, on account of the then dearth of provisions. The reason that they had no more was, because they served in the army by constraint, whereas those who served voluntarily had twenty-five crowns each per month.

“Immediately after the overthrow of the king of Azo, the general hastened to attack the countries belonging to the king of Assam; and lest the floods, which every six months overflowed the greatest part of the kingdom, should frustrate his designs, he advanced with great expedition, and arrived before that time at the place he intended.

“ In the mean time our two adventurers, and the English who belonged to the army, having observed all the signs of an approaching tempest, carefully repaired their vessels. These precautions, however, were unavailing ; the vessel in which were our two adventurers, not having been properly ballasted, was overturned by the currents, and four Dutchmen and twenty-four Moors perished. Both our heroes, after swimming several hours towards land, had the good fortune to be assisted by an English vessel, which took them on board. The next morning they thanked their benefactors and went to the army, where they sought an occasion of admittance to the general. As soon as he heard of the loss of the vessel, he fell into a violent passion, and commanded them to withdraw and choose what other vessel they had a mind to.

“ In two days after, their admiral set sail in search of the enemy, attended by the whole fleet. Although the wind was little favourable to them, the vessel which our adventurers entered, followed on the course, and three or four hours afterwards dashed against a rock, which struck off their helm. Not long after, they discovered the enemy’s fleet, consisting of six hundred sail. As soon as the enemy perceived them, they advanced, and a smart encounter ensued. They took three hundred of the enemy’s vessels, the least of which carried seventy men ; and of this whole number there did not escape above fifty. The three hundred vessels that escaped, unhappily cast anchor at about a quarter of a league’s distance from the general, who advanced up the country with all possible expedition. Having brought near three hundred pieces of cannon, he planted them against them, and sunk the greatest part of them ; the rest passed over to the other side of the river, and were pursued by the general’s vessels with success.

“ After this pursuit, their admiral cast anchor before the city of Lokwa, situated about six leagues from Gueragon. They were obliged to stay here about three months in consequence of the flood : as soon as the waters were sufficiently fallen, they quitted their post. Having been fifteen months in the Great Mogul’s army, by the mediation of their consul, our adventurers at length obtained their discharge, and prepared for their departure. In fifteen days they came to Deeka, and thence took shipping for Ongueli. Having sailed about one hundred and twenty leagues along the river, they made some stay at Cazimabaha[r] [Qázimbázár, near Murshidábád], a place famous for silks. From thence they returned to Ongueli, where each betook himself to different employs, and it was not till 1673, that the last of our adventurers was enabled to return to his native country.”

The palace of the Rájahs in Gharghón is situated nearly in the centre of a large enclosed space about a mile from the Dík’ho river, and nine miles east of Síbságar (Rangpúr). The surrounding ‘bund’ is some fifteen feet broad on the top, and about eight feet high, but considerably more on the outer face where an enormous ditch exists all around, some forty feet wide and

of various depths, made probably to provide materials for the wall as well as assist in the defence of the place. The core of the bund is said to be brick, and is covered with earth, now overgrown with forest trees. Here is also another bund, (query, an outer line of defence) some four or five miles outside Ghargáon proper. There are numerous traditions respecting the enclosed land; one that none but the better families were allowed to reside within it; another story tells us that the bund was planted with dense hedges of bamboos (hence its name Bángsarh), and this enormous tract of country was used as a preserve for wild elephants; another that it was the private property of the Rájah, and that no one could exercise judicial powers within it but the Rájah himself; whilst some think, it is merely a coincidence, and this bund was simply a road (as it is in many parts at the present date) that may have been constructed before or about the time Ghargáon was adopted the capital. The Romans have the reputation of being the masters in the art of road-making, but their efforts seem small when compared with the network of enormous bunds intersecting this country in all directions, and made absolutely from mud alone, no other materials being procurable. The same neglect which has allowed the historic monuments of this country to fall into ruins, is very perceptible to any one who has the misfortune of being obliged to travel over these once magnificent roads during the wet season.

Reference is made to Chandara in the account of Mír Jumlah's advance, by Mons. F. Bernier: this place will be seen marked about five miles from Ghargáon on the road to Síbságar, where the road cuts through the Bángsarh, and is still known by its ancient name. The gateway there, with an immense amount of fine carved stonework, has been utilized for building purposes by the Public Works Department. The road from Ghargáon to this spot is very different to the 'Rájah' roads, and seems never to have been properly repaired since dug up to annoy the enemy's troops in 1662. The city of Lokwa (Lukwah) mentioned in the sailor's narrative, is some sixteen miles from Ghargáon, on the Rájgarh: not a brick is to be seen there now, the place is at present a tea garden; a portion of Mír Jumlah's fleet must have gone up the Desang upon which Lukwah is situated, and probably a portion of the forces marched down the Rájgarh to invest Ghargáon on the east, whilst another portion of the fleet and army went of the Dik'ho, landing about where Rangpúr (Síbságar) now stands, to attack on the west; for it seems highly improbable that the whole of the forces could have gone up the Desang to attack Lukwah, when the Dik'ho route to Ghargáon was nearer, more practicable for both fleet and army, and had water communication to within gunshot of Ghargáon itself, whilst Lukwah was at least sixteen miles distant.

The stone gateway mentioned by Robinson, the guard houses, and other brick buildings in the enclosed space at Ghargáon have all disappeared since



1866; the bund is overgrown with forest; the ditch in many places filled with rank vegetation, and the enclosure itself a mass of dense jungle. The palace, as before mentioned, is rapidly crumbling away; in 1869, the north-west front consisting of two verandahs fell in, the balustrades in many places are gone, huge cracks gape in every direction, the rain finds its way from top to bottom of the building, and although the plans shew that it is of the most massive construction, it is hardly safe for a visitor to mount to the summit. Some twenty years since, it was temporarily occupied by some tea planters who are said to have made slight repairs; they are also credited with having found a sword having a silver hilt, and an ivory and gold sheath, besides other valuables.

The so-called palace itself may be described as a quadrangular pile of brickwork consisting of three stories above ground, and two subterranean ones. The surface of the soil being very soft and liable to inundations from the Dík'ho, an immense mass of boulders was placed there, upon which the palace was erected, some ten feet above the level of the surrounding country. These boulders were probably procured from Santok Mukh, about twelve miles from Ghargáon, up the river Dík'ho, that being the nearest place where they can be found. The subterranean chambers have been visited of late years, but presented nothing of interest, and at the present date are hardly accessible from fallen brickwork, &c. The building has cupolas at the angles and a terminal one at the summit in the centre; the openings on to the verandahs are generally arched, frequently cusped: all the decorations are in stucco, and although cut or carved bricks have been found in the immediate vicinity, not one is visible in or on the palace itself. This is singular, as cut bricks seem to constitute the chief ornaments of the old Asamese buildings in this district. The walls and piers are very massive, and the openings generally small. The general design seems more ornate than useful, and it is apparently as much a temple as a dwelling or palace. The bricks, or rather tiles, of which it is entirely composed (not a particle of wood or stone being perceptible) are extremely hard and frequently bear a polish, and are seldom of the same thickness and superficial measure, a fair specimen  $8'' \times 10'' \times 1\frac{3}{8}''$ . In one verandah the ornamented stucco has fallen off in places disclosing an under layer of the same material having the same pattern but on a slightly smaller scale. The plans and photographs will give a far more correct idea of the peculiarities of the building than any written description can supply. The buildings near the palace were standing some three years since, and consisted of a large square room, said to have been a room for holding nautches in, and a long arched passage-like building of which it is impossible to conjecture the use. Remains of brickwork some three hundred yards from the palace lead to the conclusion that there might have been a brick wall surrounding it at that distance, but the dense jungle

renders it impossible to follow it up. There were several large tanks also within the enclosure, of which but one remains in good order. The remains of a bund surrounding what might have been a fruit garden has also been noticed.

A very curious tradition respecting the builder of the palace is current amongst the natives. A Bangáli architect named Gonsam was invited by the Rájah Chuckenmung to construct this palace. Wishing to obtain for his Rájah in Bengal all particulars as to the strength and population of the country, he suggested that in making the bricks they should be mixed with the white of eggs to render them harder. On Chuckenmung enquiring where such a vast number of eggs could be obtained, he intimated that if every one in Asám gave two eggs each, he would probably have sufficient for his purpose. The order was accordingly given, the eggs provided, and secretly counted by the builder. Unfortunately for him, the Rájah was quite alive to the stratagem, and when the building was completed, dismissed him and his assistants with great praise and riches. They were escorted across the river to be conveyed to Dík'ho Mukh by road (the Bor Allí); but immediately they got as far as Nazírah, they were attacked, made prisoners and beheaded on the spot, and the treasure returned to the Rájah.

The importance of this place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be judged from the immense number of ruined temples, vast tanks, enormous maidáns, and the once magnificent roads and river bunds; it is now but sparsely populated, and the greater part of the country is one enormous jungle. The district is well worthy of a visit by some competent antiquarian, to rescue from oblivion archæological treasures that are now rapidly perishing from neglect and wilful destruction, and would amply repay the time and labour spent upon a thorough investigation of its many art treasures and historical monuments.

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